

The Hand and Script

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London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero A. x, Art. 3

Gothic *textualis rotunda formata/media*, s. xiv ex.

SIZE *c.* 171 x 123 mm (*c.* 137 x 91 mm)

Ff. 37r/41r–122v/126v form a booklet within this Cottonian manuscript, containing four poems (*Pearl*, *Cleanness*, *Patience*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*) by an anonymous poet to whom consensus assigns no other work. Valiant attempts have been made to identify the poet as John Massey, whether in decorative flourishing on ff. 58v/62v and f. 110r/114r (e.g. Vantuono 1975, 1981)¹ or through the identification of encrypted clues (e.g. Kooper 1982); for a good overall account see Scattergood (2001). Some connexion with the Stanley family of Staffordshire and Cheshire is argued (Wilson 1970, Edwards 1997, 198). *LALME* (McIntosh *et al.* 1986, I. 23–34, III. 37–38 LP 26) locates to Cheshire; Hanna advances north Yorkshire for origin,² and Fredell (2014) places decoration in York. In truth, nothing is known about this manuscript before it entered the library of Henry Savile, of Banke, in Yorkshire (d. 1617).

Illustrations are unusual for manuscripts in English at this time (Scott 1989: 46). An opening bifolium, unruled, contains four illustrations for the first poem (ff. 37r/41r–38v/42v); it has been suggested that this bifolium did not always stand before the first page of *Pearl* on the grounds that it shows staining (Horrall 1986: 191), with counter-argument that it was “part of the codex from the beginning” (Reichardt 1997: 137). Other illustrations are within the quires that now follow. The drawings, twelve in all, present narrative scenes. Savage cropping means that some now extend to the page edges.³

Whether or not the illustrations were part of the plan when copying the first poem was undertaken is debated. Greg (1924: 227) points out that the illustration on f. 82r/86r “was painted after the sheets were sewn and probably after the volume was bound” – the latter is unlikely, so it would seem the poems remained unbound for some time. Scott (1990: 4), dating the manuscript to the last decade of the fourteenth century, suggests that the illustrations were supplied “about ten years later” and that “the much maligned artist . . . was probably a professional”. In fuller discussion (1996, no. 12) she dates the manuscript *c.* 1375–1400 and the illustrations *c.* 1400–10, arguing that the illustrations were perhaps drawn

* With many thanks to Ronald Waldron, who has generously made comments on an early draft of this chapter, for example drawing to my attention the article by Kossick.

¹ At f. 58v/62v the red letter *m* identified within “N” is accidental and part of the decoration. At the end of the flourished S on f. 110r/114r a final scrawl has been read as “Macy”.

² See Hanna (1995): “The two generative provincial cultures of the pre-1350 poems are the dioceses of Worcester and Hereford, and north Yorkshire (and not, as alleged, Cheshire)”; and views reported by K. Kerby-Fulton (2012, p. 57 n. 78 and n. 90).

³ For full discussion, see Maidie Hilmo, “The Illustrations”.

by a regional artist at the request of the owner. Lee (1977: 19) separates draftsman and painter, and finds the “drawing superior to the painting”, as does Kossick (1990: 23), who argues that the painter knew the poems less well than did “the more careful linear artist” and that the colour “was added sometime later, even much later, than the completion of the drawings”. Lee (1977: 39) shows how the draftsman selected elements from established “iconographic and stylistic traditions”. Ronald Waldron suggested a similarity in the treatment of vegetation in the *Pearl* sequence with murals in the chapel at Haddon Hall, Derbyshire (reported in Kossick 1990: 37 n19).⁴ What if the drawings were made by the scribe? Some time could well have elapsed between the drawings and the clumsy addition of colour. At the very least, these line drawings with their added later colouring need not be seen as an attempt to reproduce a finer exemplar illuminated in a fashionable continental style (*pace* Mathew 1968, 116–17).

Quiring (1², 2–8¹², 9⁴) suggests a complete compilation.⁵ The first page of *Pearl* (f. 39r) shows staining and may for some time have served as the outer sheet of an unbound collection.⁶ Each poem begins on a recto, with a text-free page or leaf preceding.⁷ Text pages are generally ruled for thirty-six lines of script,⁸ as are some pages without text (e.g. ff. 56r/60r and 56v/60v between *Pearl* and *Cleanness* and f. 126v/130v (final page), but some are without ruling (e.g. ff. 82v/86v and 90v/94v). Quires II–VIII, in twelves, have catchwords in the scribe’s hand (ff. 50v/54v, 62v/66v, 74v/78v, 86v/90v, 98v/102v, 110v/114v, 122v/126v), with quire IX (ff. 123/127–126/130) completing the booklet. *Sir Gawain* ends on f. 124/128v, a centre spread. Edwards (1997, 197) suggests that the “scribe apparently copied the manuscript as a single construct”, but McGillivray (2005), arguing from evidence about the distribution of *d*, *b* and *h* bitings, points out that “significant time intervened between the copying of *Pearl* and that of *Cleanness* and then again either after the writing of *Cleanness* and before *Patience* or between *Patience* and *Sir Gawain*”. The interruption in ruling on some pages intervening between poems supports McGillivray’s observation.

Carefully calculated space was left for flourished large capitals, eight (to nine) lines deep to mark the opening of each poem (this is the depth of the bowl of “P” at the beginning of *Pearl*, where lesser indentation is allowed for the stem for a further six lines). The flourishing of P on the opening page of *Pearl* (f. 39r/43r) is overlarge, creating a sense of stinginess in page design. More space is allowed in the left margin for the three other major initials: “C” on f. 57r/61r (the most heavily cropped opening?); “P” on f. 83r/87r (x 36 lines of writing, and ruled for a further six or seven lines in the upper margin); and “S” on f. 91r/95r (x 25 lines of writing, so a very generous upper margin). The use of simple pen-flourishing, usual from Romanesque book production onwards but by this time perhaps less fashionable, may help

⁴ By the datings put forward by Naydenova 2006, the Haddon Hall murals are later than Nero A. x.

⁵ For full discussion of the manuscript’s codicology, see Alexandra Gillespie and Daniel Wakelin, “The Codex”.

⁶ I have not come across any discussion of the indentation or fold mark that runs horizontally across the middle of the booklet’s final pages, ff. 123/127 - 126/130. Did it perhaps stand at the end of some now lost collection? If so, the collection was secured by clasp (its shadow part visible) and metal strip.

⁷ Eriksen (2014: 49), writing about a French manuscript, states that starting text on the recto was a common standard in the thirteenth century. I can find nothing on this practice for English vernacular manuscripts.

⁸ Below top line as to be expected, so usually thirty-seven ruled lines. Note f. 80r/84r has thirty-seven lines of writing (R.A. Waldron observation).

create an old-fashioned feel, but three to four line initials of this sort remained standard. Such flourishing, perhaps “no more difficult than is writing” (see Scott-Fleming 1989: 10), may be scribal. The presence of “bubbles” alongside the flourishing is regarded as a marker of Yorkshire workmanship by Fredell (2014: 111), but these occur more widely.¹⁰ Note the face of a man inside three three-line initials, *G* at f. 48r/52r “Grace”, 50v/54v l. 13 “Thys”: *Pearl* 841 and *T* at f. 99r/103r “Then”: *SGGK* 619, instead of decorative red strokes.¹¹

Throughout *Pearl*, space is allowed for three-line initials that open each group of stanzas, with a four-line initial for “F” on f. 39/43v, the second group of stanzas. Each page has three stanzas. All but one of the groups of stanzas comprise five stanzas: exceptionally there are six across the opening f. 50v/54v (end quire) and f. 51r/55r. Some editors would omit a stanza from this group, but numerological considerations support retention of all six,¹² as does the aberrant “M” on f. 52r/56r, where a group of five stanzas might have been expected to begin. With the three-line deep “I” of f. 52v/56v the expected grouping of stanzas is righted. On f. 45v/49v, where the membrane is particularly scruffy in the top left-hand corner, the scribe omits a line (*Pearl* 472), and there is a mark of omission at the end of l. 3 but no supply.

Space for for three-line (sometimes four or six lines) initials was left also within the other poems, giving sections of irregular length. There are twelve large initials within *Cleanness*, usually three-lines deep: f. 58v/62v “Now”, f. 59v/63v “Bot”, f. 60r/64r “Bot”, f. 61v/65v “Now”, f. 63v/67v “On”, but f. 64v/68v “Syben” (four-lines deep), and f. 65r/69r “Olde”, f. 66v/70v “The”, f. 68v/71v “His”, f. 69r/73r “Ruddon”, but once “Danyel” on f. 73r/77r is five-lines deep with a line left free (so 35 lines of writing on page) and the only three-line deep initial thereafter is f. 75v/79v “The(n)ne”. The flourishing of the “D” on f. 73r/77r stretches across the page in the line left free, thus signalling a major division. Within *Patience* four sections are marked by three-line initials: f. 83v/87v “Hit”, f. 86r/92r “Now” (last two lines of page and straying below), f. 87r/91r “Lorde”, f. 88v/92v “Muche”. Two-line paragraph markings indicate stanzas in *Cleanness* and *Patience*, but most editors are unwilling to open space every four lines although some number the poems in fours.

The capitals in *Sir Gawain* are much discussed by critics who wish to oppose Madden’s four-fitt division, which seems supported both by the appreciably larger space allocated for “This” on f. 97v/101v (four-lines deep, beginning II), “Ful” on f. 106r/110r (six-lines deep, beginning III)¹³ and “Now” on f. 117v/121v (six-lines deep, beginning IV) and by the

¹⁰ Fredell also finds distinctive (p. 113) the bubbles within the left-hand shaft of the flourished A of f. 53r/57r. His second York feature, “an unusual use of green”, he does not locate in Nero A. x. A profusion of bubbles is part of the decoration in London, British Library, MS Burney 252; see the puzzle initial f. 4v on BL website, a Spanish manuscript of the last quarter of the fifteenth century. See also Watson 2003, plates 25, 37, 39. Cf. Stirnemann (2008): 161 Note 1 on frogspawn.

¹¹ But not I think f. 121r/125r l. 24 “The(n)”: *SGGK* 2259, where Kirby-Fulton (2012, 58) identifies a “grotesque face”.

¹² See Andrew and Waldron 1978, p. 94 “The concatenation words *neuer þe les(se)* emphasize the limitless quality of heavenly bounty.” To my question as to whether anyone makes anything of lines drawn roughly through the upper part of the first stanza on f. 47r/51r, R.A. Waldron suggests “Perhaps a reader disagreed with the Maiden!”

¹³ Note “3” below end of lower part of flourishing.

movement of the flourishing across a line left free. Thus, the layout first adopted for the “Danyel” initial on f. 73r/77r in *Cleanness* is again employed. Five three-line capitals are found at f. 99r/103r “Then”, f. 101r/105r “Nade”, f. 110r/114r “Sone”, f. 116r/120r “Now”, and f. 121r/125r “The(n)”. For Hill (1946: 71) there is “no absolute four-fold division”. Tuttleton (1966) points to the significance of “blank-line space” in *Sir Gawain*, sees the four-fold division to be “useful”, and argues for “minor parts” within “the larger counterpart”. Nevertheless, Edwards (1997) thinks the editorial division into four parts misleading, followed by Kerby-Fulton (2012, 58–59), who argues that “the manuscript instead privileges nine passages”.

The openings of stanzas are marked by two-line paragraph markers. The end of each stanza is marked clearly by the bob (a couple of syllables) and wheel (four short lines). The bob is set somewhat to the right of the last stanza line before the wheel or one or two lines above; Kerby-Fulton (2012, 62–63) draws attention to the variable positioning of the “floating” bob as significant, but her interpretation is more for the reader’s eye than the listener’s ear.

The last text page, f. 124v/128v, is the final page of *Sir Gawain*. Whereas the three preceding poems are religious, the more secular thrust of this romance could have been felt to require some sort of apology. I should like to suggest therefore that Garter motto at the bottom of f. 124v/128v, “Hony soyt q(ui) mal penc(e)”, serves as a witty and guarded retraction: for Halpern (1972: 383), regarding the motto as the last line of the poem, it is “a restatement, but in a negative and chilling form, of the poem’s theme”. The ink seems to be the same as in the text above, although in script these words, like “Amen” at the end of the poem, are enlarged, differentiated for display (cf. f. 55v/59v, f. 82r/85r and f. 90r/94r where *amen* conclusions are also differentiated). The lettering of the prophecy on the scroll, f. 56v, “mane : techal : phares”,¹⁴ looks similar. The couplet at the top of f. 125r/129r (perhaps further reflection on the garter motto), described by Gollancz (1923, 11) as possibly in the hand of the artist, could, indeed, be viewed as the scribe’s more cursive hand – in the couplet the minims are separately made and the ascenders taller. Doyle (1983, 166) suggests that the scribe “was happier with anglicana than the textura he or his employer felt was called for”.

Late in the fourteenth century a *cursiva* script would have been more usual for poetry in English; in any case little vernacular poetry was copied in the higher grades of *textualis*. Nero A. x, in the plainer hands of the schools, is formal in the choice of *textualis*, but hardly calligraphic in its execution. A Gothic *rotunda* script, very basic and plain, it is generally dated to late in the fourteenth century, which is when the *Gawain* poet is thought to have been active. There is an old-fashioned look to the performance, and parallels should perhaps be sought among Anglo-Norman manuscripts.¹⁶ Although uneven, especially in *SGGK*, where there are signs of haste,¹⁷ the care taken over such details as writing minims separately

¹⁴ Three dots as dividers. Words as in the poem reflect the biblical “mene mene tekul upharsin”.

¹⁶ Doyle 1982: 92 compares London, British Library, MS Egerton 3082 with the *Pearl* manuscript; it is “of similar ductus and size” but from the early to mid twelfth century and to my eye not really comparable.

¹⁷ The scribe’s radical abbreviation of the hero’s name to *G* (x 5) or *s(ir) G* (x 4) happens first in line 1179; and reading through *SGGK* leaves the impression of less well defined minims as the poem advances.

is noteworthy. The distribution of *v* (word initial) and *u* (elsewhere) is mostly observed, a feature that entered textualis scripts from *anglicana*. The abbreviations have attracted little comment. Words as we understand them are generally given space, except that proclitics may attach and the words of phrases occasionally stand together. Bitings with *d* are general but other bitings vary in distribution, with more proportionately in *Pearl*, the first poem copied (McGillivray 2005).¹⁸ The lack of any evidence for fifteenth-century dating supports a convergence of pointers towards the late fourteenth century: the manuscript decoration; the costumes in the illustrations; even the motto at the end.

A single scribe for the texts is generally assumed; Oakden's argument (1930, Appendix 3) for seven scribal steps between the author's copies of the four poems and Nero A. x was shot down by Greg (1932). Madden's description of the hand (1839, xlvi) lends words to most descriptions thereafter: "a small, sharp, irregular character, which is often, from the paleness of the ink, and the contractions used, difficult to read". For Petti (1977, 49) the hand "is probably one of the most distinctive and easily recognizable book hands of the period, though this is the only example that has come to light".

Given the savage cropping of the leaves, it is hard to gauge how effective the page layout must once have appeared. Despite the poor quality of membrane, particularly in the fifth quire, the overall impression is of the scribe's care for the task in hand. The ascenders and descenders are short, as one would expect in what is the lowest grade of gothic textualis script: *b*, *h*, *k*, *l* lack loops, and most descenders turn to right at foot, but not *b*. The letter forms vary in execution, their shapes simplified and constructed with uneven strokes. As is often the case for gothic hands *n* and *u* must be interpreted according to context (the use of the *v* shape initially is helpful); moreover, the straight sides of *o* may lead to its misinterpretation as *u*. In addition, *c* and *t* are not always distinct, and in bitings *b* and *l* may present difficulties to the reader. The heavier concentration in the amount of biting, with most to be found in *Pearl* at the outset of collection, suggests that the scribe was at first following customary practice for writing Latin, only to realize it was not ideal for reading English. He was probably accustomed also to reading and copying French; hence the use of *-tz* and *-ez*. Words (or words with normal clitics) are generally set in decent space, though short low-stress words may stand close to following word (e.g. f. 101r/105r l. 3 "Bi a mou(n)te": *SGGK* 740) and word blocks sometimes present editors with difficulties. Some notes follow on letter forms of particular interest.

a two lines with oblique stroke rising through middle, i.e. box-*a*, his usual form (the usual form for *textus rotundus*). Less often two compartment with bow closed, for example f. 117r/121r l. 3 "as": *SGGK* 1937 – a form more likely to occur at line openings. Open two-compartment form may occur in bitings, e.g. f. 42r/46r l. 14 "half": *Pearl* 230.

b not always closed at bottom. Not easy to distinguish *le* from *be* with biting, as at f. 45r/49r l. 14 "bey(n)g": *Pearl* 446 rather than "ley(n)g", or f. 47v/51v l. 4 "bere": *Pearl* 616 rather than "lere".

¹⁸ For full discussion of the bitings, see Kenna L. Olsen, "The Writing System".

c two stroke; top flat, with near dip, longish. Not always distinct from *t*; see, for example, f. 40v/44v l. 54 “fyrte”: *Pearl* 54 sometimes read as “fyrce”; f. 48r/52r l. 27 “fate”: *Pearl* 675 needs emendation to “face”. Also in ligature with straight *s*.¹⁹

d round; ascender short; generally fused with following *e* at end of words; other *d* bitings fall off in frequency.

e three strokes, perhaps with third not always made; elongated final stroke, esp. at end of line.

f on line; foot curls to right without penlift (cf. straight *s*).

g two-lobe form. Main value is the stop of words such as *get* and *gold*, but also alternates with initial *i/I* for the affricate in *gemme*, *gentyl(e)*, etc. As *-g(g)*, may stand for final sound of *bridge*.

ȝ or “yogh”, in form descended from the insular *g*, was retained with some of the values of its ancestor (but no longer as a plosive consonant): the semivowel both word-initially as in f. 44v/48v l. 16 “ȝong”: *Pearl* 412 (cf. *y* in f. 95r/99r l. 21 “yo(ur)”: *SGGK* 311) and in words such as *hyȝe* “high”; the voiceless front fricative before *-t* as in *myȝt*, *riȝt*, etc; and the voiced and voiceless back sounds of words such as *folwe* “follow” and *puȝt* “thought” respectively. In addition to these multiple functions, the same form is used for Anglo-Norman *z* (cf. use in writing French in England, as in first hand of BNF, nouv. acq. fr 4503, for which see Careri *et al.* (2011, no. 85 at 192) “*z* en form de *ȝ*”; s. xii^{4/4}), and is therefore commonly found at the end of words, especially in possessive and plural noun inflexions alongside *-es* (*-ez* seems likelier to follow voiced stops and *-es* voiceless stops, as f. 61v/65v l. “godeȝ hestes”: *Cleanness* 341, but there is no tidy distribution). Note especially that *-tȝ*, with *ȝ* hanging off the cross stroke of *t*, alternates in the verbs *dotȝ* ~ *dos*, *hatȝ* ~ *has*, *matȝ* ~ *mas*, *faytȝ* ~ *fas*, *tatȝ* ~ *tas*, *watȝ* ~ *was* (McLaughlin 1963, 49, §3.5) and is found once in the noun “metȝ” (f. 59v/63v l. 35: *Cleanness* 215.²⁰

h second limb extends below line so distinct from *b*; bitings frequent in early part of manuscript.

i plain short stroke; may have tick (helpful if one of three minims, e.g. f. 42r/46r l. 29 “into”: *Pearl* 245). Also covers consonantal sound, as f. 117r/121r l. 22 “iapeȝ”: *SGGK* 1957, f. 117r/121r l. 27 “soiorne”: *SGGK* 1962 and, with tick, f. 42r/45r l. 33 “iuel”: *Pearl* 249. Long form used for the pronoun “I”, e.g. f. 54r/58r l. 27: *Pearl* 108: also used at the beginning of words, both for vowel, as f. 41r/45r, l. 7: *Pearl* 151 “iwysse”, and consonant, as 42r/46r l. 36 “Ioyles”: *Pearl* 252.

k with horizontal final line.

l upper part tilts to left.

¹⁹ Use where later English has *ci*: 39v/43v l. 24 “p(re)cos” *Pearl* 60; 40r/44r l. 33 “gracos”: *Pearl* 95; 41v/45v l. 12 “(p(re)cos”: *Pearl* 192; 51v/55v l. 34 “g(r)ato(us)”: *Pearl* 934 (editors here read *c*; the *g* looks odd); and compare possible transposition of letters in f. 90r/94r l. 24: *Patience* 522 “malcio(us)”, though has *ci* in f. 90r/94r l. 10 “malicio(us)”: *Patience* 508.

²⁰ On Gordon’s assessment (1953, 91–93) of such forms, McLaughlin notes “so far as I have been able to determine no difference in spelling is occasioned by a difference in position” (p. 99), but argues that for *tȝ* “the weight of the evidence seems to favor its interpretation as [z]” (p. 100).

m minims separate and turn to left. Seems to avoid use of rounded capital form except as a capital. (In f. 87v/83v l. 2 “Dame Mekenesse Dame mercy 7 Miry cla(n)nesse”: *Patience* 32 the scribe may have felt capitals were called for but manages a few only which lack the height that might be expected of capitals.)

n minims separate and turn to left.

o the two strokes frequently don’t meet tidily; first stroke can extend to right at bottom. Maybe anything goes for the two strokes, as long as they aren’t vertical. When cursively written, as f. 60r/64r l. 20 “of”: *Cleanness* 236, formed in single stroke that ends by crossing diagonally through middle.

p bowl round and finishing with stroke to left through shaft; descender very short with turn at foot to right. Thus, carefully made and distinct from *þ*.

q descender very short. Note use of *qu-* as well as *wh-*, e.g. 42r/46r l. 4 “quyte”: *Pearl* 220.

r short; two parts; occasionally more cursive with well, as f. 117r/121r l. 11 “pore”: *SGGK* 1945. Round *r* frequently after *o*; more sparingly after other letters, but for example see f. 63v/67v l. 16 “ebrv”: *Cleanness* 448 and more surprisingly f. 62v/66v l. 30 “zere3”: *Cleanness* 426.²¹

s like *f*, on line, with foot curling to right. Seems not to use this form finally, which accords with dating to latter part of s. xiv. The *st* ligature with straight *s* descends from caroline; similar ligature for *sc*. Elaborate round -*s* at end of words, which may rise above script module and have its tail prolonged at the top, especially later in the manuscript.

t usually protrudes above the cross stroke as; in ligature with straight *s*. For *t3*, see under *3*.

þ has lost its ascender, and its short descender tapers to left. Distinct from *p*, which has a fuller bowl and descender turning to the right. Generally distinct from *y* except occasionally in *SGGK* (e.g. f. 108r/112r l. 8 “yat”: *SGGK* 1267), where often the descender is so short as to make identification difficult. Note that *th* is also in use, and especially in capitals. Overall, however, the scribe rarely resorts to dotting *y*, and he keeps *þ* and *y* apart.

u *n* and *u* not distinct. Context does not always resolve this ambiguity: e.g. at f. 44r/48r l. 13 “han”: *Pearl* 373 is alternatively interpreted as “hau”. The pointed shape *v*, used for the most part at the beginning of words, a feature derived from cursive script (Derolez 2003, 94), has same value as *u*. But in two French-derived words the scribe may have used space to alert readers to the position of stress and the voiced sound that joins in the line’s alliteration, at f. 111r/115r l. 14 “de vaye”: *SGGK* 1497 and f. 124r/128r l. 22 “a venture”: *GGGK* 2482. (However, the parts of preposition and adverb *on vnder* stand apart, as in f. 41v/45v l. “an vnder”: *Pearl* 166,²³ so it may have been an ad hoc choice.) Sometimes used singly where *w* might be expected, e.g. f. 63/67v l. 16 “ebrv”: *Cleanness* 448, where the head of the first stroke curves to the right.

²¹ Thus at f. 63v/67v l. 30 “tryned” (with *-ned* later touched up in darker ink): *Cleanness* 498 the two-shaped *r* could reflect the scribe’s expectation of a verb such as *tyrn*.

²³ The scribe used *3* instead of round *r* in f. 53v/57v l. 24 “vnde3”: *Pearl* 1068.

x three strokes. as f. 117r/121r ll. 10, 15 “fox”: *SGGK* 1945, 1951.

y much variation in form. Three-stroke: first stroke when carefully made may have top with flick over to right; leg long and turns diagonally to left, sometimes curving (often very faint), e.g. f. 39r/43r l. 28 “agayn”: *Pearl* 28. Two-stroke: cursively made shape has simple first pen-stroke, with plain diagonal as second turning at foot to right, e.g. f. 117r/121r l. 25 “fyrst”: *SGGK* 1960. With dot only infrequently, e.g. f. 65r/69r l. 10 “lysten”: *Cleanness* 586. Occasionally with more elaborate tail, e.g. f. 42r/46r l. 8 “mynde”: *Pearl* 224. Usually a vowel, but can occur for word-initial semivowel, e.g. f. 39r/43r l. 10 “yot”: *Pearl* 10.

w first two strokes may be simple and short, e.g. f. 109v/113v l. 10 “wayth”: *SCKK* 1381, but when taller have serifs rising to right; generally in shape and height it is more appropriate to *anglicana* than *textualis*. The letter can cover for expected accompanying vowel, as f. 117r/121r l. 33 “nw 3ere3 day”: *SGGK* 1968.

Small capitals

No settled repertoire. Use of dot or extra line important part of make-up for *A*, *C*, *D*, *E*, *L*, *O*, *P*, *T*, and a heading curve often used. Angularity noteworthy. Special forms occur for *A*, *B*, *D*, *F* (double *f*), *I*, *M*, *N*, *P*, *R*, *S*, *T*, *U*. However, quite a few letters lack special forms (*3*, *h*, *k*, *p*, *w*, *y*); for these enlarged forms may be used at the opening of lines and the approach stroke sometimes shows thickening.

A from caroline minuscule, a distinctive form with loop and curved down-stroke may be used at the opening of lines, as f. 65v/69v l. 31 “Abraham”: *Cleanness* 643, f. 67r/71r l. 13 “AA”: *Cleanness* 733,²⁴ and sometimes with cross stroke, as f. 52v/56v l. 13 “As”, l. 25, “AS” *Pearl* 985, 997. The box-*a* is also used at the opening of lines (f. 46r/50r l. 25 “as”: *Pearl* 26 with point in upper part, f. 46r/50r l. 25 “al”: *Pearl* 27 without), as is the double-bowed form (f. 61v/65v l. 1 “alle”: *Cleanness* 325 with point in upper part.

B from simple Roman capital, but much variation; down-stroke curved; bottom stroke may dip to give angular effect, as f. 92r/96r l. 20 “Bot”: *SGGK* 85 (cf. *T*); bows cursively made with thin strokes, as at f. 47v/51v l. 1 “Bot”: *Pearl* 613. May be quite plain, as f. 86v/90v l. 15: “Bot”: *Patience* 261.

C basically a gentle curve with a dash at the top and including a vertical line through its centre, of the letter, e.g. f. 45r/49r l. 1 “Cortayse”: *Pearl* 433; f. 74/78r.

D curved down-stroke with exaggerated half-loop added at top; horizontal dash at foot; angular doubling of bow to left, as f. 48v/52v, l. 14 “Dauid”: *Pearl* 698. The bowl of the rounded form may contain two horizontal strokes, as f. 54v/58v l. 1 “Delit”: *Pearl* 1117; or a single curved stroke, as f. 54v/58v l. 13 “Delit”: *Pearl* 1129; or may have a thickened curve, as f. 83v/87v l. 1 “Dame”: *Patience* 31. Note zigzag effect to left at f. 83v/87v l. 2 “Dame”: *Patience* 32.

E based on uncial type with included vertical line from the middle of which horizontal protrudes and may link with next letter, e.g. f. 46r/50r l. 13 “Er”: *Pearl* 517.²⁵ Has angular back and encloses “+” with final tongue crossing through following l f. 66v/70v l. 21: *Cleanness* “Elles”: 705. At f. 84v/88v l. 31 “Ewr(us)”: *Patience* 133 the head, extending like

²⁴ Johnson and Jenkinson 1920, 3, for date 1256 (but p. 4, for date 1121 as capital).

²⁵ Johnson and Jenkinson 1915, 16, for date 1371.

the diagonal stroke often distinctive of *G*, is striking. Ronald Waldron points out that “it comes at a significant point in the text (Fall of Lucifer).

F (*ff*) f. 59v/63v “ffor”, ll. 1, 2, 6: *Cleanness* 181, 182, 185; but cf. f. 59v/63v “for”: *Cleanness* 183, 184, 186.

G is a four-stroke letter, as at f. 102r/106r l. 29 “Gawayn”: *SGGK* 842.

I horizontal across top and angular bow at foot infilled with red stem thickened in red, horizontal across top at f. 66v/70v l. 13 “I”: *Cleanness* 697. At f. 50r/54r l. 25 “I (Ie)r(usale)m”: *Pearl* 817, is the capital form and its linking to a long stroke meant to signal and low-stress preposition *i* for *in* followed by abbreviation?

L enlarged *l* with slant stroke through middle, as f. 50v/54v l. 25 “Lasse”: *Pearl* 853. Cf. to mark out a noun at f. 54v/58v l. 13 “Lo(m)be”: *Pearl* 1129.

M made with three pen-strokes; first and third curve; may finish by turning to right, e.g. f. 46v/50v l.13 “More”: *Pearl* 553 with thickened strokes and plainer at f. 46v/50v l.l. 25 “More”: *Pearl* 565.

N enlarged *n* with first stroke curving in towards foot; and cross stroke f. 51r/55r l. 13 “Nauþeles”: *Pearl* 877; enlarged *n* with feet to right and rising diagonal stroke through near top of letter f. 51r/55r l. 25 “Nowþeles”: *Pearl* 889; enlarged *n* with rising diagonal stroke f. 63v/67v l. 13 “Noe”: *Cleanness* 481. Cursive form marked by stroke added across middle f. 62v/66v l. 14 “Noe”: *Cleanness* 410, with which cf. more elaborate initial of “Noe” at f. 63v/67v l. 12: *Cleanness* 480.

O basically a two-stroke large rounded form: with included vertical line, f. 49r/53r, l. 25 “O”: *Pearl* 745 or diagonal line f. 73v/77v l. 26 “Ou(er)tok”: *Cleanness* 1213 or dot f. 92v/96v l. 34 “On”: *SGGK* 137. When oblong in shape may be elaborately built and decorated at the left, as f. 53r/57r l. 13 “Of”: *Pearl* 949, with which cf. zigzag decoration to left sometimes of *D*.

P may have diagonal stroke in bowl in bowl with final stroke extending to left, as f. 72v/76v l. 1 “Perle”: *Cleanness* 1117. Cf. more oblong bowl of f. 88v/92v l. 3 “Passe”: *Patience* 393 where cross stroke has trail to left.²⁶ At f. 41v/45v l. 13 “Perlez”: *Pearl* 193 the letter is more showily decorated.

U enlarged form with a heading curve instead of a loop sometimes used, e.g. f. 101v/105v l. 24 “Vpon”: *SGGK* 799.

R from simple Roman cap; down-stroke curves; bow ends half-way down, where horizontal stroke (curvy) begins; bottom stroke slants downwards, e.g. f. 48v/52v l. 25 “Ry3twysly: *Pearl* 709.

S enlarged simple round form with approach stroke and at end extension stroke after line-initial capital, as f. 40r/44r l. 25 “So”: *Pearl* 97. Plainer forms at f. 53v/57v l. 13 “Su(n)ne”: *Pearl* 1057; f. 62v/66v l. 13 “Saue”: *Cleanness* 409. Diagonal line runs through

²⁶ Something faint written in different hand to left of the capital: “þis”?

capital at f. 61r/65r l. 13 “Sem”: *Cleanness* 299; and through its bottom part at f. 72v/76v l. 13 “So”: *Cleanness* 1130.

T derives from half-uncial *t*; down-stroke straight and protrudes above cross stroke; curve, starting a little way up from its foot, includes short vertical stroke, as f. 47r/51r l. 13 “Then”: *Pearl* 589; more rounded at f. 48v/52v l. 1 “The”: *Pearl* 685, and narrower at f. 49r/53r l. 13 “This”: *Pearl* 733; f. 53v/57v l. 25 “The”: *Pearl* 1069 with more angular shape

Punctuation

Line by line layout for the manuscript’s four poetic texts is general, often with an opening small capital (or enlarged main-text form that may show some thickening of strokes. Words are normally separate. Occasionally word hyphens occur.²⁷ There are few markers of punctuation apart from //, the two strokes indicating a new paragraph. In *Cleanness* and *Patience* these generally occur every four lines, sometimes cutting across a more natural grouping of lines. If entered before the copying of texts, these // signs suggest careful planning on the scribe’s part, especially for *SGGK* with its stanzas of varying length. In *SGGK* the “floating” bobs are written to the right of the stanza’s final long lines, thus saving space, and marked as run-overs by preceding signs (these vary, for example a small decorative alert, or two dots or // or some combination thereof). Syntactical punctuation is so rare as to seem involuntary, a matter of occasional points; see, for example, f. 61r/65r l. 7. Not all proper names receive initial capital letters. Thus f. 87v/83v l. 2 “Dame Mekenesse Dame mercy 7 Miry cla(n)nesse”: *Patience* 32 shows inconsistency.

Abbreviations

Probably the most frequent abbreviations are the Tironian sign 7 with cross through downstroke for *and* and the overline to mark the omission of *m* or *n*.²⁸ Editors tend to note that the abbreviation signs of Nero A. x are “standard and do not call for comment” (Anderson 1959, 3), but a brief note follows²⁹.

Letters

m / *n* for overline see, for example, f. 54v/58 v l. 13 “Lo(m)be”: *Pearl* 1129, f. 39r/43r l. 30 “dou(n)”: *Pearl* 30.

e a slanting line through an ascender gives *e*, as f. 63v/67v l. 7 “wyr(l)e”: *Cleanness* 475; “logh(e)”: *Cleanness* 366.

Special signs

ꝛ *er*, as at f. 63/67v 4 “wat(er): *Cleanness* 472; f. 77v/81v l. 12 “mort(er)es”: *Cleanness* 1487; f. 101r/105r l. 19 “pat(er)”: *SGGK* 757.

ꝛ generally unpacked with *ur* as for Latin, e.g. f. 57r/61r l. 19 “eno(ur)led”: *Cleanness* 19; but Menner (1920, x, n3, following Cook) argues for its expansion by *r* above *o*.

²⁷ See f. 58/62r l. 20 “de-gre”; *Pearl* 1022; f. 64/68v l. 30 “wonder-ly”; *Cleanness* 570; f. 73/77r 2 “char-ged”: *Cleanness* 1154 and f. 81/85r l. 16 “de-cre”: *Cleanness* 1745.

²⁸ [At f. 101/105r l. 36 “say gilyan”: *SGGK* 774 “say” is generally regarded as missing the overline and emended to “sayn”, but I wonder whether it should be regarded as a spoken *sandhi*-feature.]

²⁹ My respect for the hand has grown during this exercise: the scribe is sparing in his use of slashes through ascenders for a vowel and does not go in all that much for otiose end-word strokes for *-e*. Menner (1920, x n2) identifies examples of meaningless flourishes in *Cleanness* but these seem few by comparison with the practice of other scribes writing English around 1400.

9 for *us* has striking tail, e.g. f. 90r/94r l. 10 “malicio(us)”: *Patience* 508 and f. 90r/94r l. 24: *Patience* 522 “malcio(us)”. Magoun (1937, 129–30), discussing *v(us)* and monstrosities such as f. 97r/101r l. 16 “behoue(us)”: *SGGK* 456 and f. 118r/122r l. 18 “v(er)tuu(us)”: *SGGK* 2027, suggests these are to be found in s. xiv West Midland texts, comparing *Alexander B.*

ʃ for *-es* or *-e3*, as f. 64r/68r l. 7 “spek(es)” or “spek(e3)”: *Cleanness* 511.

p(er/ar) with line through descender, as f. 45r/49r l. 9 “emp(er)ise”: *Pearl* 441; f. 57v/61v l. 7 “p(ar)aunt(er)”: *Cleanness* 43; f. 84v/88v l. 12 “p(er)il”: *Patience* 114; but *re* at f. 47r/51r l. 20 “p(re)termynable”: *Pearl* 596³⁰.

p(ro) f. 45r/49r l. 14 “p(ro)perty”: *Pearl* 446.

q with diagonal curved line through descender is general and a full form is spelled out once only at f. 101v/105v l. 2 “coþe”: *SGGK* 776. Editors choose generally to expand either by *quod*, as is normal for in Latin, or by *quoth*.

s straight form with diagonal curved line through descender, the *ser* abbreviation, gives “s(ir)” in English, as f. 42v/46v l. 5 “s(ir)”: *Pearl* 257.

Space-saving superscript letters

^a f. 61r/65r l. 6 “g(r)ace”: *Cleanness* 296; f. 63v/67v l. 19 “g(r)acyo(us)ly”: *Cleanness* 488.

i f. 59r/63r l. 35 “p(r)iyde”: *Cleanness* 179, where Menner reads “pride” and suggests scribe has brought down *y* in error after having made the abbreviation, but *priyd* spellings occur in midland and northern texts.³¹

^u f. 107r/111r l. 25 “t(r)ue”: *SGGK* 1210.

b^t space-saving superscript *t* makes *b(a)t*.

b^u space-saving superscript *u* makes *b(o)u*.

w^t space-saving superscript for *with* which, when spelled out, occurs more frequently with *y* than with *i* in Nero A. x.

Clearly, the scribe is accustomed to the abbreviations customary for Latin, but he may not expect to encounter occasional words of Latin in these texts. For example the phrase *sancta sanctorum* occurs twice: f. 74v/78v l. 15 “þsancta sanctor(um)”: *Cleanness* 1274 (did he hesitate as to whether or not the English article should precede?) and f. 77/81v l. 16 “þe s(an)c(t)a s(an)c(t)or(um)”: *Cleanness* 1491 (but here he lacks the connecting adverb *þer* that

³⁰ Some editors (e.g. Andrew and Waldron, McG and Stook) plus *MED* transcribe “p(er)terminable” MM.

³¹ At f. 49/53r l. 35 “?”offys”: *Pearl* 755 it is tempting to read “of t(r)iys (cf. Gollancz) rather than taking what looks like superscript *i* as the completing stroke of *f*. Donaldson’s “ost(r)iys” is an overingenious *durior lectio* (1972, 75–82).

should follow). Once in an ad hoc way the variable abbreviation for *spiritus* is deployed, in f. 77v/81v l. 17 “sp(irit)ually”: *Cleanness* 1492, with overline above *u* rather than above *p*. Again in *Cleanness*, the proper noun Adam is oddly treated, written as “am” with two-bows *a* above in line 237 (f. 60r/64r) and as “adm” with three very deliberate minims and with an *a* added above. The manuscript’s other two instances of this name, *Pearl* 656 f. 48r/52r and *SGGK* 2416 (f. 123/127a), are normal full forms.

Three proper nouns are variously contracted and would have been readily recognized: Jerusalem, Jesus and John. The last of these generally ends in *n*, with an overline above the last letter, in abbreviations used for Latin *iohannes* forms, e.g. f. 49v/53v l. 32 “Iohn”: *Pearl* 788 and f. 50v/54v l. 8 “iohn”: *Pearl* 836, 53r/57r l. 12 “Ihn”: *Pearl* 1020; etc.; a monosyllable seems intended, as at f. 44r/48r l. 23 “Ion”: *Pearl* 383, where there is no mark of abbreviation.

Noteworthy in *SGGK* is the radical shortening of Gawayn (etc., various spellings) to *G* with or without a following indication of the abbreviation in lines 1179, 1624, 1686, 1872, 2280, 2299, 2396, 2429 and 2496.

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